THE MINORITY

By FREDERICK TREVOR HILL

Author of "The Case and Exceptions," etc.

"I appreciate what you have been good enough to say, Mr. Harlan," he remarked after a pause, "and I think I should make it perfectly plain to you why I would not go into this thing even if I thought it a good business venture. The very first evening we met, you may remember Mason and the others joking about my being a crank on work-people. Well, I'm a crank still. I think I take more interest in my workmen than I do in the factory, although, of course, the two are so closely allied it is only when one stops to think that he can locate the center of his interest. These men are something more to me than animated wheels. I am something more to them than their employer. I have a small village of them on the Hudson, and for some years I have conducted the business largely for them although it has resulted in my own profit too. That is at the bottom of my rejection of any proposition of the syndicate, Mr. Harlan."

The two men strolled downstairs together, but it was not until they were about to part that Mr. Harlan spoke again.

"There's one thing more I ought to say," he began. "You may think it strange that knowing what I do, I should have accepted your invitation to inspect your factory. I did so because I could not well refuse at the time, and thought something might turn up to prevent, as it did. But I want you to know I never intended to make the visit. You understand, do you not?"

Kennard shook his host's hand reassuringly.

"Certainly," he answered heartily. "I appreciate your scruples, but they were unnecessary. Quite unnecessary. I renew the invitation. Come any day you like. We'll take you from cellar to roof, and I promise we won't do it by blowing you up."

CHAPTER IX.

Opposition had no terrors for Mr. Harlan. He expected it. He understood his business, and his business was to overcome it. Delays did not annoy him, difficulties did not discourage him, complications only gave him new zest for his task. He had never found

"YOU DON'T SEEM GLAD TO SEE ME."

anything worth doing which could be accomplished easily. He had often seen his most careful plans miscarry, but never without learning the reason, and with him the discovery of an error revealed the remedy. His success was built upon that solid concrete of mistakes, surprises, and corrections which we call experience.

It was with no novel sensations, then, that Mr. Harlan returned to his house, and seating himself in the easy-chair of his library proceeded to work out the secret of his failure with John Kennard, for at the outset he admitted he had failed completely. There was no necessity for deceiving himself. He and his easy-chair had solved many another puzzle, remedied many another mistake. It was ten o'clock—still early in the evening for Joshua Harlan. He rang the bell, ordered the butler to bring whisky and soda, and then dismissed him for the night.

Mr. Harlan filled a long glass with whisky and soda and began working at the problem.

Who and what was this Kennard, anyway? A man who had found his business prepared and ready for his hand, who had never had to work his way up or experience set-back and failure. It had all been such plain sailing that he had had leisure to theorize and indulge his theories, coddling his workmen and playing with economic nostrums until the sentimentalist in him was satisfied and his self-sufficiency complete. Let him experience one year of real competition with no nonsense about it, and the superior smile would be on the other side of his mouth. Perhaps Trundell could be made to see this yet, and, if so, the amateur economist might have his pet theories tested and his cut-and-dried systems disarranged in a way he little dreamed of. He had been inclined to work with rather than against young Kennard, but if that individual thought the man who engineered the Milling Companies' deal "ridiculous," it was plain they were an ill-assorted couple. If—

Mr. Harlan started as he heard the door-bell ring, and realized as he rose to answer the summons for the first time in many years he had worked himself into quite a temper.

The butler had not yet retired, and when his master reached the hall the man handed him a card with the name Peter McMannis printed in flourished script.

"Show him in and then go to bed, Perkins. I'll close up."

Mr. Harlan threw himself into his chair with a muttered oath, lit a cigar and picked up the evening paper. He was still reading when his visitor was ushered in, and a curt nod was all the greeting he vouchsafed.

But McMannis seemed unabashed by the lack of welcome. He nodded in return, and while the servant moved about the room arranging the cigars and glasses, he stood with his back to the fire stroking his black mustache, which had acquired an oily look and a drooping curl at either end. His hair, which was plastered in little scallops over his forehead and deeply parted from the back of his head, bore evidence of the cheap barbers' manipulation. The whole appearance of the man had undergone a transformation since his last visit. Every weak line in his face showed plainly and his rough, coarse features had been tempered until his whole personality fairly reeked with brutal vulgarity.

"Well, Josh," he began affably, as the butler closed the door. "You don't seem glad to see me."

"Didn't I tell you not to call here again!"

The answer came from behind Mr. Harlan's newspaper.

"So you did. But what's the dif? I don't come at reception hours or ask to meet your daughter, do I?"

Mr. Harlan slapped his paper together and smashed it down upon the table.

"You must be drunk!" he muttered.

McMannis laughed.

"Dammed if I don't think I am," he retorted, "but you're the winner by it this time."

He stepped toward his host as he spoke and tossed a roll of bills upon the table.

"What's that?"

"The 50 plunks I owe you. Don't faint, old man. They're the genuine green."

"Then you got—"

"Elected? Sure, Mike. I don't promise to pay you all I owe you. I don't even know what it is, but I said I'd give up this, and, hell—it was worth it to see you jump!"

McMannis helped himself to a cigar, bit the end off, and spat it out in a sputter of laughter.

Mr. Harlan glanced suspiciously at the man, slowly gathered up the bills, and stuffed them into his pocket without a word.

Then he leaned forward, relit his cigar over the lamp, and sat staring at his visitor.

"You got a good job?"

The words were a statement rather than an inquiry.

"Yes, better than I expected, and we might have a drink on it," he added, eyeing the bottles with a grin.

"What is it?"

"Whisky, of course."

Mr. Harlan's face relaxed for an instant, but became rigid again as he pushed the bottles forward.

"I meant what job did you get. I thought you'd quit drinking."

"So I have, but this in an occasion. If we wait till you get another dividend it'll be a long time between drinks. Wish you may live till then, Josh."

He poured out a generous portion of raw liquor, smelt it, nodded over the glass, and tossed it off with a peculiar jerk of his neck, following it up with a swallow of water.

"That's my third to-day—honest count and polls closed to-night," he vouchsafed, as he wiped his mouth on the back of his hand and picked up his half-chewed cigar.

Mr. Harlan lifted a paper-knife from the table, tried its edge absent-mindedly, and then sat silent, bending the blade back and forth between his fingers. McMannis watched him with a broad grin on his shiny face, but spoke no word.

"What is your job?"

The question was sullen and disdainful.

"A snap—a soft snap. Chief of the walking delegates you might call it, though it's known as assistant high workman. Say, but that's good liquor, Josh! Funny such a good hand at buying it don't have no real taste for it. And since you press me so cordial, Josh, I guess I'll take one more teaspoonful."

He poured out another deep drink, and gulped it down with a "here's how!" and a shuddering exhalation of breath like a man in a bitter-cold wind. Then he rubbed his hands together, struck a match on his trouser leg, started to relight his cigar, but burst out laughing as he noted Harlan's bored and contemptuous glance.

"Say, what's the matter with you, Josh!" he exclaimed. "You're as huffy as hell, and look as glum as Dolan's goat when she swallered the tin-can crossways. Take a drink. Have one on me, and stop chewing the rag for five minutes anyhow. Gosh, but you do look silly!"

McMannis broke into another spasm of merriment, quieted down, wiped his eyes, and then glancing at Mr. Harlan's solemn, unmoved countenance, burst forth again into peal upon peal of laughter, until the tears ran down his face and he had to seat himself for very weakness.

"What is the—er—the chief of walking delegates expected to do?"

The question was asked contemptuously and with weary indifference, but McMannis in his social mood welcomed it eagerly.

"What does he do?" he responded, jocularly. "What won't he do when I'm it? That's the question to ask, Josh Harlan. I've been waiting for a chance like this for years, and now I've got it, I'll work it, you bet. Say, do you know how many men's—how many men there are in our association?"

Mr. Harlan shook his head.

"Well, I'll tell you." McMannis drew his chair closer to his host and leaned forward confidentially, pouring out another drink of whisky as he talked. "Therah—there's more than 25,000 in it, and not more than ten or a dozen ahead of me. Now d' ye see where I'm at? Maybe you think the organization won't take care of me now? Maybe I won't control a bunch of votes worth having, and maybe I don't know the market value of 'em, neither. They thought they'd stall me at Philadelphia for up the state—but not much! New York city's my mound, and I'm here to stay."

He paused to swallow another drink, and then proceeded in an uglier tone, his language coarsening as his tongue loosened.

"Yes, and I'm goin' to make some of these companies set up and count, you bet. Oh, I see you staring at me, but your old milling company is all right. That's what comes of having a friend at court, Josh, for I bet you're as rotten as punk. But say, to see you sittin' over there," McMannis straightened himself and mimicked his host's manner with a drunken leer, "one would never think you could touch anything tougher than a cushion. But I know you, you old wood-faced mut—you're as sly as they make 'em and are doin' two tricks a day, I bet. I wish I knew a few of them. Damned if I wouldn't come and pay up so's I could give you away and see you squirm!"

McMannis paused to laugh at this picture, pointing at Mr. Harlan and rocking himself to and fro in an ecstacy of mirth, which ended in a knuckling of his eyes and a long blast on his handkerchief.

"Well, well," he panted at last, "you've stood by me some, Josh, while others have done me dirt, and I don't guess I'll forget anybody. I've been walked on enough to see there's nothin' in playin carpet, and now I'm goin' to try a few steps myself. S-shay—say, but I've been trod on so long, it seems kinder natural to lie down when anybody gets in my way. Just before I went to Philadelphia I was acting delegate in the out-of-town district, and got orders to look up a fellow who keeps one of those model factories on the river. It was way off down the Hudson, so I telephoned him I was coming, but never got no answer, and when I got there the guy wouldn't see me and I actually vamoosed. Say, but you oughter heard the way the fellows horsed me about that! The idea of a delegate lettin' himself be turned down got them. But that comes of gettin' used to bein' pavement. Next time I call, my bird'll see me all right, all right. And I call soon! I won't do a thing but roast him, you bet! Kennard's his name—ever heard of him? Say, did I tell you what I was workin' to get from the organization?" he rattled on. "Well, I'm layin' to have a friend of mine appointed factory inspector, and if I do, the rake-off won't be a thing to what I can pick up on the side. Those fellows has the power to file papers against the companies, and make 'em come near building their buildings over again in complyin' with the law. It'd work in great with the delegate business. Now, f' instance, suppose youse—suppose you had a factory— S-say, are you listening, you frozen-faced goat?"

Yes, Mr. Harlan was listening.

CHAPTER X.

To the cynical eye the crowd in the Grand Central station is apt to typify the monotony of life and suggest its littleness. It is always the same. Mingle with it to-day and return an hour, a day, a month, a year, ten years later, and you will find the same people surrounding and jostling you. Some face you may look for in vain, some voice may fail to greet you—that often happens in crowds—but are they lost or are you?

Kennard hurried across the muddy floor, dodged through the nearest exit, raced to the barrier, and reached it just as the iron gate rolled to and bit its lock with a vicious snap.

"Next local 5:04 on track 2!" chanted the official, mechanically.

The panting passenger dropped his heavy bag with a groan and looked at his watch.

There was half an hour to wait, so he sauntered back to the telegraph office and sent a message to Mrs. Parsons at Mamaroneck, saying he had missed his train. It should have been punctually late, as usual, but something had "crisscrossed his luck" that day, he admitted to himself, as he shoved his bag under one of the long benches and settled down to sit it out.

By the time his train started Kennard had almost recovered his drooping spirits, and when the lights of the Mamaroneck station twinkled through the haze, not even the damp fog and chilly atmosphere served to depress him.

Mrs. Parsons' carriage was not to be seen in the cluster of vehicles near the platform, and Kennard picked his way among the traps and teams, peering closely at the half-hidden drivers. But one by one they drove off, and when Kennard reached the station again, all the cabs had also disappeared, and he faced the prospect of walking to his destination, lugging a heavy bag. Resigning himself to this fate, he started down the road, in the wake of a low dog-cart disappearing slowly into the fog. Hoping against hope, he quickened his pace in pursuit, and was soon rewarded by recognizing Carroll Parsons' astrakhan coat and furs. With a cheerful halloo he ran up behind the cart, tossed in his bag, and swung himself into the seat beside the girl.

"Well met, Carroll!" he exclaimed. "If you were trying to abandon me, I had a narrow escape."

He grasped the girl's disengaged hand in both of his and shook it warmly.

She laughed pleasantly in answer as the pony started forward at a brisk pace, striking sparks from the flinty road.

"Well, how are you?" he continued. "I'm terribly glad to see you. You don't know how glad. I've been in the worst possible temper all day, and if it hadn't been for the thought of coming here to-night, I believe I'd have assassinated half a dozen people. As it is, there are probably more than that number who'd like to assassinate me. It was mighty friendly of you to meet me a night like this," he ran on, "especially after I'd missed my train. At first I thought you hadn't come, and I was starting to walk when I saw you. Hope you haven't left a house full of company. I'm afraid you have. But do tell me you haven't got a horrid lot of outsiders."

"Really, I don't think I'm in a position to say."

Kennard peered sharply at his companion.

"I beg pardon," he began awkwardly, "but I fear I must have—that there must be a mistake. You are not—"

"I have been trying to tell you so ever since we started. Now I feel like a criminal. I shall never be able to convey to Miss Parsons the warmth of your greeting!"

The merry laugh which had first answered him broke forth again.

"I hope you will pardon me," he began once more. "I thought this was Mrs. Parsons' cart and—"

"It is."

"And you are—"

"Unintentionally disguised in Miss Parsons' coat and furs, which she'll never forgive me for wearing in weather like this, even if she condones the theft of your greeting. Hereafter I shall change the proverb, 'We are known by our friends,' to 'Our clothes are known by our friends.'"

"I know you now. You are—"

"One of the horrid outsiders. I confess it!"

"That's hardly fair, Miss Harlan."

"I am discovered!"

"I hadn't the slightest idea you were to be here, but if I had known it, that coat and those furs would have invited the same mistake. Now, honestly, do you blame me?"

"Not at all. It is Carroll you must make your peace with. Mrs. Parsons

SHAKING HER FINGER AT IT AND MOVING HER LIPS IN DISAPPROVAL.

and she went to Rye for other guests, and as the coachman went too, I was assigned to meet you. At the last moment I couldn't find my own cape, so picked up these and—"

"Thus misled me a second time."

Miss Harlan glanced at the innocently grave face beside her, and touched the pony lightly with her whip.

"I call that downright brutal," she announced, in a tone which implied more mirth than indignation.

"Shall we proclaim a truce?"

"Perhaps—I think we'd better if—"

She hesitated, and looked at him defiantly.

"If what?"

"If you ask it."

"Well, suppose we both capitulate."

"With all the honors of war?"

"Certainly."

"Very well then."

"Let's shake hands on it."

"Not now," she laughed; "the pony's too lively, and besides, we've already done it—at least, you—"

"Remember the truce!"

"Forgive me—I almost forgot it."

The cart swung past the lodge gate as they spoke, and the blue-stone scattered and crunched beneath the wheels as they flew up the private roadway. A few moments more and they were in the cheery hall, standing before a blazing fire.

Mrs. Parsons and her daughter had not yet returned, the butler told them as he busied himself with the tea things.

Kennard helped Miss Harlan remove her coat, which she hung over the back of a chair, shaking her finger at it and moving her lips in pantomimic disapproval. Little beads of mist still clung to her hair, sparkling like tiny jewels, and the damp atmosphere had only served to deepen the healthy glow of color in her cheeks. Kennard thought of the last time he had seen her thus, a crumpled jacket in her hand and the white mist clinging to her hair, but with no color in her face. She glanced at him, and he knew the same scene was before her. For an instant he feared she was about to speak of it and thank him for something—just what, he did not know—but the few words Mr. Harlan had dropped left an impression that for some reason she wanted to thank him. He had dreaded this moment and prepared for it, but now it was at hand he could recall none of his plans for changing the conversation. For a few moments neither of them spoke; then she turned to him.

"I shall always associate you," she began gravely, "I'm afraid I shall always associate you with spoiled jackets."

He smiled gratefully.

"Was it ruined?"

"Utterly!"

The exclamation was comically tragic.

"It was well you had presence of mind enough to use it," he observed consolingly.

"That was merely the animal instinct of self-preservation. Perhaps not even that, for as I recall it, you had no coat—"

"Oh, you wrong me. It was the foreman whom you saw in his shirt-sleeves."

She nodded comprehendingly.

"You don't want to talk about it? Very well. Only please don't try to compliment me for involuntary actions. It makes me suspect that you didn't mean— Shall I play the hostess and pour tea?" she asked suddenly, as the butler placed the low table between them. Kennard stretched out his hand for the cup she offered him, and as he took it, looked at her inquiringly. There was a warning light of mischief in her eyes, and he withheld his question till the servant left the room.

"That I didn't mean what?" he asked.

"What you said."

"When?"

"That day. Don't you remember?"

"Not what I said."

"Dear me, that makes me still more skeptical."

Miss Harlan tossed back a lock of hair from her forehead with a slight movement of her head.

"Skeptical as to what?" he persisted.

"As to whether you meant what you said."

"Which was?"

"It is hardly worth repeating, since you don't recall it," she answered in an offended tone. "But you did say, whether you meant it or not, 'Well, you've got some horse sense!' It was not a polished phrase, perhaps, but, oh—it tasted so good!"

Her laughing eyes kindling with enthusiasm met his grown suddenly serious.

"And did I say nothing else?" he asked.

"Nothing I care to remember."

"So be it. Though I meant every word—those and others. But don't let's talk about this any more. Is there to be a large house party here?"

"Yes, I think so. Quite a few outside—"

Kennard pulled out his handkerchief and waved it vigorously.

"Respect the flag," he entreated earnestly.

"I humbly apologize. Mistakes will occur at first. We were speaking of the other—guests. Perhaps you know some of them. Roy Gilbert and Stanford Lawrence, two college friends of Garrett Parsons, and Mr. Croyden, are the men."

"Of course I know him. He's quite recovered, then?"

"Quite, I believe. The girls are Miss Thompson and Miss Garrett. Have you met them?"

"No."

"There's no one else, I think. Yes, I forgot, there's a Mr. Maddox."

"Not Dave Maddox of California?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Is it possible? I haven't seen Dave for years, although he's one of my closest friends. What a small world we live in! Who would have thought of meeting him here? This is a party of pleasant surprises."

Miss Harlan picked up the fire-tongs and drew her chair nearer the chimney.

"Speaking of small worlds," she began—"No, thank you, I don't want any help; did you ever know any one who did, when about to assault a wood fire? —Speaking of small worlds, I chanced upon a friend of yours, very unexpectedly the other day—a friend and a great admirer."

"There are not many to answer the description, but I fear to guess. Who was it?"

"Mrs. Mullin."

"Pat Mullin's wife?"

"Yes."

"Where in the world did you come across her?"

"At the Riverside club. She and her children came to a Christmas party there at which I happened to be assisting."

"How did you discover she knew me?"

"By accident. I remarked on the freshness and rosiness of the children, at which she told me they lived in the country, and said their father worked in your factory. I said I knew you, and then—well, I've heard panegyrics before, but of all the—"

"Mrs. Mullin has the virtues of the good-hearted Irish, but also the extravagance of the simple-minded."

"But, shure, an' her man Pat, she sez," mimicked Miss Harlan, "do wurshup th' very ground ye trids on."

"Pat is another good-natured, faithful, foolish old—"

"But she further informed me that there wasn't a man in your employ who didn't—"

"Please spare me Mrs. Mullin's eulogy," he protested.

"It was very impressive, I assure you—so much so that I almost determined to write and ask you a favor."

Miss Harlan was working with the tongs at a heavy log and did not look up as she spoke.

"Why did you change your mind?"

"I didn't think I did, I only postponed the day."

"Till when?"

"Till you were in a particularly good humor."

"Am I not qualified now?"

She glanced at him quizzically for a moment, abandoned the tongs, and vigorously attacked the log with a poker. Then, as the leaping flames lit up her face, she turned her head, and studied him with a judicial scrutiny.

"N-o-o," she decided at length. "I don't think you are—quite. But this is a great favor, and I think I'd rather earn it anyway. Don't you want something very, very much?"

The question was asked almost pleadingly, but with a little gesture of mock impatience.

A dozen phrases rose to Kennard's lips at the bidding of that picture in the firelight. There was a challenge in the mischievous, mocking, tempting smile which he longed to meet, but when he answered, it was to the merry, friendly, clear gray eyes he spoke.

"Yes, I think I can suggest something. When we first met, you promised to make trial of me as a disciple in your school of philosophy, whose sessions were held only in the country. We're in the country now. What is your charge for tuition? You see I have a good memory."

"For promises—not voices."

Kennard hastily pulled out his handkerchief and tied it on the shovel.

"I salute the flag," she laughed, "and capitulate! Here comes the house party."

[To be Continued.]

Notice of Appointment.

Estate of E. V. Grim deceased.

The undersigned has been appointed and qualified as administrator of the estate of E. V. Grim, late of Highland county, Ohio, deceased.

Dated this 18th day of February, A. D. 1905.

R. W. COLES.